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ABSTRACT

The McKinley Project represents a systems approach to reorganizing instruction. The reorganization was based on three conclusions drawn from a comprehensive investigation of research and practices by the Commission on Public Personnel Policies in Ohio. The conclusions were that (1) variance within a grade level on many learning variables is greater than between grade levels, hence, nongradedness; (2) self-contained classrooms are least effective among alternatives, hence, teaming; and (3) grade retention seldom benefits the child, hence, nonretention. Teacher competencies, new relationships with colleges and universities, systematic inservice training, instruction aids and media, behavior based instruction, parent involvement, peer teaching, and criterion-referenced evaluation constituted the instructional design. Reality testing was achieved by conducting the experiments in a blue-collar community, in an old "box" building, and within normal budget limitations. (Author)

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REORGANIZING FOR LEARNING AT McKINLEY SCHOOL -- AN EXPERIMENT IN MULTI-UNIT INSTRUCTION

by Larry Lorton

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I. INTRODUCTION

On June 15, 1971, John Gilligan, Governor of Ohio, was presented with the first copy of a report, Organizing for Learning, by Mr. Stephen Stranahan, Chairman of the Commission on Public School Personnel Policies in Ohio.

Among the Commission's key recommendations are these:

(1) That capabilities of individual teachers need to be more closely matched with needs of individual students--instead of assuming that any teacher can effectively teach any student any subject.

(2) That the new teacher needs the aid and supervision of his more experienced fellow teachers--instead of leaving the new teacher largely responsible for his own improvement as he works alone in his self-contained classroom.

(3) That improved instruction will result if teachers plan together and are exposed to the example, observation, and stimulation of their peers--instead of assigning the teacher to work alone in the privacy of his classroom.

(4) That aides and other resource people can be valuable allies for the classroom teacher--instead of burdening the teacher with all classroom tasks, instructional and non-instructional.

(5) That teachers should be financially compensated for assuming added instructional duties and responsibilities--instead of paying all teachers according to a single salary schedule.

(6) That the principal should be the instructional leader of the school--instead of organizing the work of the school in such a manner that the principal becomes bogged down in administrative detail.

(7) That efforts should be expanded in effectively measuring of all plans of teaching--instead of relying almost solely upon subjective evaluation, as at present.

(8) That high priority should be given to in-service training for teachers and administrators in new ways of utilizing staff--instead of attempting to institute new plans without prior training of the personnel who will man them.

Reorganizing for learning at McKinley involved rigid adherance to the Organizing for Learning report. Equally as important, however, were the attempts to do so within the limitations of conventional restraints. No additional operating costs were incurred, no highly favored socio-economic neighborhood school was used and no special plant structure was designed specifically for this purpose.

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II. DESCRIPTION OF THE McKINLEY SCHOOL PROJECT

A. Demographic Information

McKinley School was selected as a model for this project because it met all of the criteria outlined in the previous section. Built in 1919, it reflects the architectural style of that period. It is a brick building containing 17 classrooms, an office, an auditorium, a small gymnasium, and a lunchroom. The auditorium is being completely renovated so as to change it into a learning center.

The school is located in a middle-class neighborhood which could probably be described as blue-collar. It is perhaps the most "average" of the 17 elementary schools in Warren, both in terms of socio-economic level and student achievement. While the parents have been most supportive of the school program, the neighborhood has been less than overwhelmingly enthusiastic at the polls in support of school money issues.

B. Organization

If McKinley School had been organized again this year as it had been in the past, there would have been two classrooms each for the first, third, fifth, and sixth grades. Because of larger enrollments, the second and fourth grades would have had three classrooms each. All would have been self-contained classrooms, with the teachers having little interaction except during the lunch hour or at staff meetings. Special teachers would have come in to teach art, music, and physical education.

Instead, the school was organized around two main concepts, nongradedness and team teaching, but with several other aspects which will be explained below.

Instead of six grades, students were assigned to one of three units. Unit A included those students who were six, seven, or eight years of age; Unit B for students eight, nine, and ten years of age; and Unit C housed those who were ten, eleven, and twelve.

Except for administrative convenience, putting students into grades has never served much purpose. If one looks at the achievement or ability levels of the students in any given grade of his local school, he will unvaryingly find that, depending upon the subject area, the students vary widely.

It makes sense, then, to group and re-group students during the day so that they can be working at the level at which they find themselves at any given time. Instead of being assigned for an entire year to a certain grade, the student should be working, on a day-to-day basis, with other students who have reached the same skill levels as he.

A third concept around which the project was organized was that of "non-retention."

Nearly every piece of research done on the subject has shown that retaining, ("failing") students does little or no good. At McKinley, the goal will be for each student to work through the various skill levels in

six years. It may be that an occasional student may be retained for a longer period of time in a given unit, but even when this occurs he may be working in the unit above in certain subjects; at least he will not be retained for a full year in a grade and be forced to repeat some of the things he has already mastered.

By the same reasoning, the advanced student should not be given artificial limits imposed by the grade in which he has been placed. If he is a "fourth-grade" student who is working at sixth-grade level in mathematics, then he should be permitted to work at that level and not be kept back because others in his grade do not have his ability.

C. Staffing

Under a traditional staffing pattern, McKinley School would have been allotted 14 teachers. Instead, the staff was organized as shown in Table III.

TABLE III

Staffing of McKinley School, 1971-72

Principal

Unit A	Unit B	Unit C
1 Team Leader	1 Team Leader	1 Team Leader
3 Teachers	3 Teachers	3 Teachers
1 Aide	1 Aide	1 Aide
2 Student Teachers	2 Student Teachers	2 Student Teachers
1 College Junior	1 College Junior	1 College Junior

Reading and Media Specialist

It is through this staffing plan that McKinley School carried out the primary recommendation of the Commission (and a goal of all educators), namely, that the capabilities of teachers be more closely matched with the needs of students. First of all, instead of the traditional pattern of assigning 29 students to one teacher, this project assigned approximately 125 students to eight adults. It can be seen readily that this serves the purpose of reducing the adult-pupil ratio of 1:28 to approximately 1:15. In addition, the traditional teacher in the self-contained classroom has always faced the problem of what to do with the remaining students when she is concentrating on one or a few. In the McKinley plan, no student was left to his own devices unless this was a part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the teaching staff to allow him to engage in individual study.

Only twelve certificated teachers were directly involved in the instructional process. Since fourteen had been allocated to the school, the staff itself decided that the salary which would have been devoted to one teacher should instead be used to hire one full-time aide for each unit. For the remaining position, the staff wanted a full-time specialist who could run the learning center and who could also help individual students with reading problems when assigned to the center. Such a person was found and assigned to the building.

In Ohio and elsewhere, the traditional methods of training teachers have come under attack. Much of this criticism has centered around a failure of colleges and universities to assign prospective teachers to actual school situations at an earlier time, and for longer periods of time, in their training program.

At McKinley, student teachers received a valuable experience which they could never achieve in a self-contained classroom. Instead of being exposed to one teacher and thirty students during their student teaching, they were exposed to four teachers (at least) and 125 students. They had the opportunity to observe several styles of teaching and they, in turn, were observed by several critic teachers, not just one.

In addition college sophomores and juniors were assigned to the school as part of an early laboratory experience. These students obviously were limited in the kinds of tasks which they were permitted to carry out, but there were many kinds of tasks which were appropriate for both these people and the aides in each unit. Listening to students read, the showing of flash cards, working with individual students on simple learning problems--all of these fall under the title of "teaching," but they do not require the services of a fully certificated teacher.

D. Other Innovative Aspects of the Project

1. Use of School Psychologist.

Typically, school psychologists work directly with students. They administer and evaluate tests and they work individually with those students who seem to be having problems. Psychologists work with teachers only indirectly. Once having diagnosed a student's problem, the psychologist may suggest to the teacher various strategies for alleviating those problems.

At McKinley, the psychologist (assigned to that school on a part-time basis) worked directly with teachers. The assumption was that if some of the human relations problems of teachers could be solved, this in turn would carry over into their relationships with students. One of the problems anticipated at McKinley (or at any school involved in teaming) was that there might be some work which needed to be done with teachers who would now be intimately involved with one another over long periods of time in planning and teaching. A teacher with human relations problems with other adults has little problem as long as she is in the self-contained classroom. In teaming she is brought into almost constant contact with colleagues.

2. Student Tutors.

Educational research has demonstrated that one effective method of instruction is to allow a student to be taught by one of his peers. A student who has had learning problems of his own may be the person best equipped to understand why someone else isn't learning.

During the 1970-71 school year at McKinley a pilot program was instituted whereby two types of student-student tutoring was carried on. The first type involved bringing to McKinley high school students who were potential teachers. These were members of the Future Teachers of America club at Harding High School. The second program used upper-grade students from the school to tutor those in the lower grades. Teachers at McKinley expressed satisfaction with these programs and they were modified and expanded for the project.

3. Parental Involvement.

McKinley School has a history of parental involvement. Two years ago several mothers took turns in the school library. During the project one of the aides again organized mothers for helping in the school, although their role changed as a result of the school having a full-time media specialist and three full-time aides.

4. Quest Program.

In an effort to allow students to pursue for further study topics or activities which would not ordinarily be found in the elementary school curriculum, a "Quest" program was instituted in 1971-72. Under the Quest program, students were allowed to choose mini-courses one hour per week. Most of these topics were suggested by the students themselves.

5. Planning Time.

When the staff of the Commission on Public School Personnel Policies in Ohio was engaged in the research for Organizing for Learning, it visited a number of schools which were trying, or had tried and abandoned, team teaching.

It soon became apparent that the key factor in the success of such a venture is that of time for planning within the school day. Schools which did not allow for planning time had either abandoned team teaching or their plans were faltering.

At McKinley, through flexible use of the special teachers in art, music, and physical education, and through expanded use of the learning center, each of the three unit teams had 45 minutes each morning for planning purposes. In addition, because of a shortened lunch hour which came about as a result of most students staying at the school during that time, these teams had another 30 minutes at the end of the day.

6. Limited Use of Substitute Teachers.

The input of substitute teachers into the teaching process has long been suspect. A recent "Indicators of Quality" study at Columbia University, under which there was measurement of the effects of various inputs into the instructional process, came up with a finding which probably surprised nobody connected with schools: the substitute teacher has less effect on learning than any other component. In fact, the study indicated that he has no effect.

At McKinley an attempt was made to use very few substitute teachers. Whenever personnel in a unit were absent, the remaining members reorganized themselves in such a fashion that the learning process went on virtually unhampered. Since the remaining members of the unit knew the day-to-day plans for all members, there was no need to call in someone who did not know the children and had only a written lesson plan to guide him. The only exception to this "no-sub" procedure occurred when a teacher was absent for an extended time, or when several members of the unit were absent at the same time.

7. Cooperation With Colleges and Universities.

Education in the future is going to call for more cooperation between university and public school. Too often in the past, the two institutions have failed to recognize the advantages of close association with the other. The old arguments about the schism between theory and practice have often been the result of the theorist on the college campus not understanding the realities of the public school classroom, and the public school educator not understanding the theory.

At McKinley, there was general cooperation with Kent State University and with Hiram College, and a specific relationship with Youngstown State University. In addition to supplying in-service materials and student teachers and laboratory experience students, all three were invited to submit proposals for basic research which could be carried out in this school.

Nothing that the Commission has recommended is revolutionary. For every recommendation, there is a solid base of educational research and professional expertise which will support the thesis. In spite of this, while a few schools in Ohio and across the nation have adopted some of the innovative practices recommended, almost none have organized in such a way to encompass all of the Commission's recommendations. Despite the rhetoric about innovation in the last ten years, changes in education remain isolated, piece-meal, small in scope, and often temporary. Promising ideas tested and proven in one school or one school district have been slow in affecting classroom practice in other locations.

III. EVALUATIVE DATA

As indicated earlier, there is much evidence which would support each of the Commission's recommendations. The attempt at McKinley was to evaluate the effects on learning when all of these recommendations were incorporated into one school organization.

Five types of measures were used to evaluate schools: (1) student academic achievement--the cognitive domain; (2) student attitudes--the affective domain; (3) parent attitudes; (4) teacher attitudes; and (5) costs.

At McKinley, each of these received a pre-test and post-test treatment. Achievement tests were administered at all grade levels: a student morale scale was given to all students in the upper three grades: an opinion scale was sent to all parents: and a teacher attitude scale was administered.

The Student Morale Scale was selected as the instrument with which to measure student attitudes toward their school and toward learning. The SMS is perhaps the most valid and reliable instrument ever devised for this purpose, and it consists of seventy-two (72) statements to which the student is provided a forced-choice response -- either agree (A) or disagree (D). Since the scale is not considered valid for use with students below nine years of age, it was administered only to those students in which would normally be the upper three grades (McKinley is nongraded). Results are shown in the following table:

Table 1

RESULTS OF STUDENT MORALE SCALE

Category	# Items	Pre-Test (M)	Post-Test (M)	Differences
School Plant	12	7.6	8.7	+1.1
Instruction	12	6.6	7.4	+ .8
Staff & Regulations	12	5.8	6.7	+ .9
Other Students	12	6.4	7.0	+ .6
Teacher-Student	12	8.2	8.6	+ .4
General School Morale	12	7.2	8.0	+ .8

Quite clearly, there was a significant positive shift over the course of the first year of the McKinley Project as to the attitudes of students. This is an important result, since one of the goals of the program was to improve the attitudes of children toward school.

The position might be taken that if children find school more pleasant and reinforcing, then they will tend to make a greater effort to attend. In a setting of more pupil-teacher contact, smaller pupil-adult ratio and flexible settings for learning, attendance should increase. Attendance data for the past three years at McKinley is shown in this table:

Table 2

ATTENDANCE DATA, 1969-1972

Year	Daily Attendance (Mean)	Daily Membership (Mean)	% Atten. McKinley	% Atten. City
1969-70	404.47	424.72	95.1	95.13
1970-71	404.91	427.68	94.5	94.09
1971-72	359.93	377.57	95.2	94.85

No significant change in attendance has occurred over the three-year period. It should be pointed out in this respect that attendance figures are subject to the variables of weather severity and epidemics over which the school has no control, so that short-range comparisons are difficult to make.

One of the avowed goals of the McKinley Project was to markedly reduce retentions. A plethora of research of the subject of retentions has shown that retention usually does little good in improving the later performance of the child retained, and, in fact, may hamper that performance because of the effect that it has on the child's self-image.

Retention data for McKinley School is shown in the following table:

Table 3

RETENTION DATA, 1969-72

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1969-70	10	1	2	2	1	0	16
1970-71	6	3	1	1	1	0	12
1971-72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

An explanation of the above table is necessary at this point. At McKinley, it is the hope that each child who enters there in the first grade will complete his elementary schooling in six years. (We have not yet been able to deal fully with the program we need for the child who may complete the work in five years!)

Thus, although the typical child will spend two years in each of the three nongraded units, there will be many who will spend three years in Unit A, and only one year in Units B or C. The hope is that the "slow starter" will receive the individual attention needed to enable him to be achieving at grade-level expectation by the end of his sixth year in the school.

The pre- and post-test instrument used to measure academic achievement in reading was the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Paragraph Meaning section). Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4

READING ACHIEVEMENT (METROPOLITAN) PARAGRAPH MEANING SCORE DISTRIBUTION

Grade Equivalents	Grade Level 1		2		3		4		5		6	
	1971	1972	1971	1972	1971	1972	1971	1972	1971	1972	1971	1972
9.5+							2	5	5	3	9	4
9.0-9.4							2	1		4	3	3
8.5-8.9									1		3	1
8.0-8.4							3		3	2	6	1
7.5-7.9							4	1	3	4	7	2
7.0-7.4								2	3	5	6	3
6.5-6.9			1	2	1	1	6	1	8	14	8	11
6.0-6.4							5	3	4	8	4	9
5.5-5.9						1	6	1	7	6	6	5
5.0-5.4			3	5	7	3	6	3	3	8	5	1
4.5-4.9	3	1				2	5	9	5	9	3	6
4.0-4.4			6	5	7	9	8	7	2	11		
3.5-3.9	2	2	6	7	6	7	14	3	2	1		
3.0-3.4	2	7	5	13	14	5	9	10	1	1	2	
2.5-2.9	5	7	17	19	20	8	3	6				
2.0-2.4	29	12	5	17	5	4	1	3			1	
1.5-1.9	26	19	2	4								
1.0-1.4	6	13		1								
.5- .9												
Median	2.1	1.8	2.4	2.8	3.1	3.5	4.7	4.8	6.4	5.8	7.2	6.5
Exp. Median	1.8	1.8	2.8	2.8	3.5	3.8	4.8	4.8	5.8	5.8	6.5	6.5
NET	+3	-	-4	-	-4	-3	-1	-	+6	-	+7	-

One can see quite clearly that there are no significant or patterned overall differences in median reading scores across grade levels. However, some interesting results occur when a comparison is made of expected group medians over the first year of the program. Table 5 depicts these results.

Table 5

COMPARISON OF SAME CHILDREN OVER TWO-YEAR PERIOD EXPRESSED AS MONTHS DEVIATION FROM EXPECTED GROUP MEDIAN

1970-71		1971-72	
Grade	Deviation	Grade	Deviation
1	+3	2	0
2	-4	3	-3
3	-4	4	0
4	-3	5	0
5	+6	6	0

What seems to have happened at McKinley is a "leveling process" in which extreme below-grade performance has been alleviated. This is in concert with the goal at McKinley of bringing all children up to grade-level expectancy. What is not a goal at McKinley, however, is to bring each high-achieving student down. We will be watching this phenomenon closely during the next year to see if another year's results bring changes.

It is important to point out in this regard, however, that from the standpoint of regression, the statistical probability is great that a second score will be lower than a first score which is unusually high. Therefore, this year's 2nd and 6th graders probably did not perform as badly as it might appear on the surface. In total, we are pleased with what seems to be an indication that students are not being "left behind" at McKinley.

The Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A), sponsored by the Kettering Foundation, has been the guiding force behind the program of elementary education which has been labeled Individually Guided Education (IGE). That organization has devised an instrument with which to measure student attitudes toward their school, their teachers and their learning activities.

This instrument was administered at McKinley in October of 1971 and in January of 1972. Results of this research are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

I/D/E/A STUDENT SURVEY

Response Mode (in per cent)

Item	A ++		B +		C -		D --	
	Oct. 1971	Jan. 1972	Oct. 1971	Jan. 1972	Oct. 1971	Jan. 1972	Oct. 1971	Jan. 1972
1	40	80	30	15	10	0	20	5
2	20	35	0	5	20	50	10	10
3	10	0	60	45	20	15	10	40
4	50	45	10	5	20	40	20	10
5	90	80	0	0	0	5	10	15
6	100	25	0	45	0	15	0	5
7	100	10	0	30	0	60	0	
8	70	0	30	25	0	60	0	15
9	0	20	10	15	0	30	90	35
10	0	25	10	10	90	40	0	0
11	0	5	10	10	0	15	60	40
12	0	30	20	50	40	5	40	10
13	10	30	30	40	40	15	20	10
14	70	30	20	20	0	20	10	30
15	100	85	0	15	0	0	0	0
16	10	10	0	30	10	10	80	50
17	0	50	20	45	10	0	70	5
18	0	10	10	25	20	20	70	45
19	30	25	60	25	0	25	0	5
20	10	5	40	50	10	25	40	20
21	20	15	10	60	60	20	10	5
22	60	15	20	45	0	25	20	15
23	20	15	30	55	50	30	0	0
24	10	35	50	30	40	35	0	0
25	40	20	30	15	10	35	20	30
26	40	40	0	0	50	55	10	5

Overall, the students reveal considerably more positive attitudes and feelings about school after having experienced the reorganized environment at McKinley. Significant were the responses dealing with:

Item 1 -- greatly improved liking for school.
Item 6 -- greater number of teachers teaching each child.
Item 7 -- greater amount of movement during school day.
Item 8 -- class makeup on basis of performance.
Item 10 -- greater liking for class-mix across age levels.
Item 12 -- doing things they like each day.
Item 17 -- vastly improved instructional support from teachers.
Item 21 -- greatly improved daily use of IMC by individuals.
Item 22 -- increased effectiveness of continuous progress instruction.
Item 23 -- greater clarity in learning objectives.
Item 24 -- increased agreements between teacher and student on quality of student performance.

Since no educational innovation is likely to have much chance of success if those responsible for its operation are not in agreement with its rationale, staff opinion is an important aspect of project evaluation.

In essence, the staff at McKinley have expressed the following sentiments about the favorable aspects of the program:

1. Flexibility of staff utilization.
2. Team planning and systematic in-service training, and the sharing of ideas among units.
3. Continuous and systematic evaluation, which leads to program modification and instructional improvement.
4. Use of parents and student tutors in instruction.
5. Clear definition of roles among the staff.

At the same time, the staff feels that the greatest weakness in the new program is the need to alleviate the interpersonal dissonance created by lack of skills to effectively deal with change. This problem will be attacked during the in-service sessions during 1972-73.

Parental attitudes were assessed in the spring of 1971 and again at approximately the same time in 1972, with the same survey instrument being used both times.

Since the 1971 survey showed somewhat favorable parental attitudes toward McKinley School, it was felt that it would be difficult to show much improvement after one year of the new project. The 1972 results, then, were a pleasant surprise, and they are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

PARENT SURVEY

Item		Agree		Disagree	
		70-71	71-72	70-71	71-72
1.	Teachers generally give students individual help	68%	75%	29%	20%
2.	The superintendent and principal keep citizens adequately informed about new programs	85%	89%	13%	7%
5.	I feel free to discuss school problems with teachers	82%	90%	14%	9%
6.	Students have too much homework	18%	9%	62%	80%
7.	Teachers do not stress academic achievement enough	33%	25%	44%	51%
9.	The discipline of students in our school is generally good	88%	82%	10%	15%
15.	Our school is doing a good job of educating children of average ability	82%	82%	11%	13%
16.	Our school is doing a good job of educating children of above average ability	68%	76%	16%	4%
17.	Our school is doing a good job of educating children of below average ability	59%	65%	21%	17%
18.	The overall quality of teaching in our school is good	86%	93%	11%	5%
19.	The school is doing a good job of teaching our children to be independent thinkers	76%	79%	32%	13%
22.	Our school does a good job of keeping up with the latest methods of instructing students	79%	87%	9%	5%
23.	Our school does a good job of teaching things that are relevant and meaningful to today's students	77%	83%	10%	6%

It will be noted that only 13 of the 23 items on the parent survey were included in the above table. This is because many of the items deal with aspects of the school which have nothing to do with the new organization. These would include items having to do with food service, reading and central office services.

One of the items in which we were much interested was that dealing with discipline of students. It is certainly true that under the new organization at McKinley that students have much more freedom, not only of movement but of self-direction. Some parents view this with alarm, because they equate a good learning environment with lack of student movement and noise. Item No. 9 in Table 7 shows that there was a 6% decrease in parent attitude as to school discipline. However, an 82% favorable response is still quite meaningful.

In addition to the forced choice type of answer which the survey instrument required, individual comments were solicited from parents. Synthesized, they tended to look like this:

1. Children learn how to handle the responsibility of their own behavior.
2. Children learn to adjust more easily to change and to new situations.
3. More decisions are made by children.
4. The children have more interest in school because there is a larger variety of activities, more projects, more opportunity to express themselves as individuals.
5. The atmosphere allows students to work under less strain.
6. Overall, children seem to like and enjoy school more while learning more.

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